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## In Our View

# Casey at the press

A William Casey moves in devious ways. Especially when he's miffed.

Casey, director of the CIA, has it in mind to haul five magazines and newspapers before the bar of justice on charges that they published information that violates a 16-year-old law against revealing classified information about American intelligence activities. Casey's displeasure is aimed at The Washington Post, The New York Times, Time and Newsweek magazines, and — strangely enough — The Washington Times, a newspaper that is consistently pro-Reagan.

What moved the director to action were stories regarding the case of an American accused of spying. In addition to the bare-bone facts, these publications had published information concerning codes and ciphers; specifically, intercepted Libyan ciphers.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the United States has the capability of intercepting and decrypting coded messages from any nation. With our dominance of the super-computer field, the assumption is that the CIA and other intelligence services can break just about any code.

What, then, is the surprise in revealing that we intercept and decode messages sent by foreign powers?

But that's not the point. The point is that the venerable Casey is determined to nail these five publications with a law that never was intended to restrict the activities of the press in gathering information. The law was never intended to be a censorship issue, which is what the director is determined to make it. The law — the same one that convicted a government employee for releasing to the British publication, Jane's Fighting Ships, classified satellite photographs of a Soviet supercarrier under construction — forbids government workers from feeding information to the media. It does not prohibit the media from seeking to obtain government information.

Casey, head of a federal agency that violated every tenet of international law when its operatives mined Nicaraguan harbors, and by bombing Managua's airport — two acts of war — has risen in throbbing indignation at the press for pursuing legitimate avenues in the search for information. What he wants to do is to create a British-style Official Secrets Act for this country, where none exists.

If the administration is determined to muzzle the press — to stem leaks in a way Richard Nixon's "plumbers" never could, let it propose such a law and let the bill be debated by Congress.

Until then, Mr. Casey should stick to running his department of dirty tricks and leave lawmaking to Congress.